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IN-SERVICE EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS OF DISADVANTAGED ADULTS

by Doris Hill Adams

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In-service education for Adult Basic Education (ABE) teachers is a relatively new development, and the teachers need to understand the students' motivation in taking the courses. A brief review of the literature shows that the majority of students attended classes for reasons other than course content. Data gathered in Georgia to examine the discrepancies between ABE students' goals and the teachers' perceptions of these goals revealed significant differences. Teachers gave first ranking to a desire to learn, which students ranked third. "To make my family proud of me" was ranked seventh by teachers and fourth by students; "to get a better job" was ranked tenth by teachers and fifth by students; and "to pass the high school test" was ranked eighteenth by teachers and sixth by students. Some implications of these differences are discussed, and it is concluded that the teacher needs to understand the students' motives in order to modify the program so that the desired objectives will be reached.

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TOPIC: *In-Service Education for Teachers of Disadvantaged Adults*

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*Asterisk indicates major descriptor.

In-service education for Adult Basic Education (ABE) teachers is a relatively new development, characterized largely by short-term institutes at the national, regional, and state levels. While there have been training programs at these three levels, there are no existing in-service training models for ABE teachers at the local level with specific emphasis on factors related to adult participation in education.

ABE teachers need to understand the factors that immediately cause disadvantaged adults to participate in educational experiences, and, more specifically, they need to know how to organize and adjust learning experiences in view of the reasons that prompt participation.

Sheats and others found that "over two-thirds of these students attended night classes for reasons other than course content. They expected, for example, to make friends, to get away from the house, to learn some kind of escape experience."[1] Houle has observed that people who participate in adult education do so for a variety of reasons.[2] After exploring the nature of participation, he concludes that three orientations seemed to prevail: orientation toward (a) activities, (b) goals, and (c) learning.

The activity-oriented person participated primarily because adult education was an event that was more acceptable than other alternatives he had available to him. In other words, the adult student wanted something to do, and adult education was available. For him, it may have been a form of socializing. The goal-oriented participant was enrolled in adult education primarily because he wanted to reach some particular end which he saw as desirable, such as acquiring some particular skill or intellectually mastering some subject area. Participants who were learning oriented tended to see education as a continuous process, as an end in itself.

Sheffield later refined the three basic orientations of Houle's formulation into five classes that he termed "learning," "desire for sociability," "personal goals," "societal goals," and "need fulfillment."[3] One of the research limitations of this approach is the difficulty of placing a participant into one of these orientations. It is possible that an adult participates in educational experiences with multiple orientations, none of which necessarily predominates over the others.

Some areas of Ingham's study are similar to Sheffield's.[4] Ingham investigated the reported "leisure satisfaction" of his respondents and found four types, three of which appeared to be compatible with Houle's three orientations. His study was conducted to test techniques that would provide an efficient and objective measurement of the extent to which adults engage in educative behavior and to test one possible explanation of why some adults engage more extensively than others do in educative activities.

Verner and Booth state that adults are impelled to seek further learning by their awareness of a need for knowledge or skills to solve problems or by a desire to enhance their personal development.[5] While this awareness of educational needs may have led some adults to participate in an educational activity, their motivation need not necessarily be to learn. Participation in adult education may arise from social needs unrelated to learning.

In the Johnstone study, participants were asked to tell in their own words how they first came to enroll in an adult education course.[6] A majority recalled some kind of occupational reason. About thirty-three percent mentioned preparation for a new job, for the first job after leaving school, for a new job to replace one already held, or for vocational training encountered either upon entry into or discharge from the armed forces. Another group, about 20 percent, mentioned additional training in a line of work they had already entered. About one participant in ten recalled some change in family status that prompted his or her first ventures into continuing education. Family expansion and the lessening of family responsibilities were given as reasons about equally often. The main reasons people remembered for first enrolling in courses, then, were preparation for new jobs, advancement in present jobs, relationships with other people, and changes in status or composition of their families.

Many of these studies did not refer to ABE students; however, it can be assumed that disadvantaged adults would possess, in addition to needs and drives unique to them, many of the same human drives that prompt other adults to participate in an educational experience.

Students' Motives vs. Teachers' Assumptions

Too often discrepancies exist between ABE students' reasons for participation in ABE classes and teachers' perceptions of these reasons. Data gathered in middle Georgia revealed such differences between these two groups.[7] One can assume that the differences would be equally sharp in any school system in which the teachers of ABE classes are drawn primarily from the ranks of elementary and secondary schools. The operational significance of such differences should be incorporated into any in-service education program for ABE teachers.

Items that received the highest ranking by students in the Georgia study are as follows:

Ranked 1. I want to make home better.

Ranked 2. I want to be a better citizen.

Ranked 3. I want to learn.

Ranked 4. I want to make my family proud of me.

Ranked 5. I want to get a better job.

Ranked 6. I wanted to pass the high school test.

Teachers' rankings differed. A comparison of the two leads to suggestions of practical steps that teachers can take to incorporate students' motives into courses. In the following discussion of four of the motives, students' ranking is indicated with the letter "S"; teachers' ranking, with the letter "T".

To Learn (Ranking: S/3; T/1). Students gave a lower ranking to a general desire to learn than the teachers did in the middle-Georgia area. The significance of this gap lies in two different, but related, factors in organizing or guiding learning experiences for any group of disadvantaged adults.

That both teachers and students listed this causal agent among the highest-ranking factors reveals that both groups perceive learning as a major route to the achievement of other important life goals. The students are in the classroom because they accept this fact. The teachers have (and apparently in the middle-Georgia area they realize it) a strong causal agent to help their efforts.

Taking advantage of an adult's motivation to learn could include exposing him to the benefits of government, as well as to the duties and responsibilities it engenders. Teachers could distribute information on social security; Medicare; and local, county, and state health and welfare agencies. These materials might be used as the basis for reading and writing practice and for group discussion.

To Make My Family Proud of Me (Ranking: S/4; T/7). The strength of family ties and the influence of family attitudes and pressures are revealed in the ranking students gave to this item. How does a teacher respond to this force in shaping an educational experience? What makes a family "proud" of one of its members? How does a teacher translate this awareness into specific goals for the individual?

First, it is likely that any achievement that is specifically recognized by the teacher of the school system will help. Passing the General Educational Development (GED) test, winning a certificate in any of various crafts or occupational skills, receiving special citations from the school, the teacher, or one's classmates are all tools that the ABE teacher has available to relate specific classroom content and activities to motivational factors the individual has already declared to be important to him.

Secondly, helping the student increase his ability to communicate with other people may show up in the form of the student's improved relations with his family. Greater precision in the use of words;

increased sensitivity to the moods, needs, and interests of others, with a consequent lessening of the emphasis the student places on his own interests; awareness of specific steps that can be taken to knit the family unit more closely together, such as effectively budgeting the family income, regularly planning some activities that most families can do together, or providing for other family members to air their problems, frustrations, hopes, and anxieties are activities and accomplishments that can lead a student's family to be proud of him.

The successful ABE teacher will, therefore, stress the factors that lead to improved communication with one's family and that increase the contribution that one can make to family stability and growth. Important though external recognitions such as certificates and diplomas may be, they are of secondary importance to the basic strengthening of family ties.

To Get a Better Job (Ranking: S/5; T/10). It is difficult to explain the different rankings assigned by teachers and students to this item. Since the population studied was predominantly female, teachers may have assumed that better jobs were not available. For that reason, teachers may have placed less importance on this item than students did. If this is true, however, teachers should still make explicit their reasons for not giving greater emphasis to the acquisition of those attitudes and relationships that lead to success in the world of work. It should be pointed out that the middle-Georgia ABE program is not geared to vocational education, nor are most of the ABE programs elsewhere (although there are significant exceptions). Hence, teachers may have reasoned that little attention should be given to the world of work. Students, quite obviously, disagreed with this assessment, and a major factor for making the ABE program relevant to the needs and interests of the middle-Georgia students was overlooked or given little attention.

Short of teaching the skills required for a specific job, what can teachers do to relate ABE more specifically to the hopes of their students for a better job? Three approaches are suggested:

First, the importance of the skills taught for the purpose of obtaining a better job can be emphasized repeatedly. Secondly, the need to know how to get along with people in any business organization can be stressed. Research in other areas has indicated that failure to get along with people is more often the reason for losing a job than inability to perform the specific skills associated with the job; the tasks of one worker are so interrelated with those assigned to another worker that cooperation and teamwork are essential in the modern business and industrial world. Finally, the teacher can emphasize the importance of habits such as punctuality and personal cleanliness, as well as attitudes such as putting in a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Attitudes and habits of these types formed major

portions of the training program conducted by the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), a movement that originated in Philadelphia with the Reverend Leon Sullivan and that has spread to many other cities around the country.

To Pass the High School Test (Ranking: S/6; T/18). The relatively low ranking of this item by teachers may indicate that teachers assumed that it was useless to try to get a high school diploma late in life. The largest percentage of people in the population studied in middle Georgia is in the 41- to 45-year-old age bracket. Regardless of age differences, students may simply have been seeking a second chance after failing or forfeiting the first chance. It must be noted, however, that the ABE program encompasses grades 0 through 8; it lays the ground work for adults to pass a high school test. That teachers may not have stressed the importance of passing a high school test was at variance with the desires of the disadvantaged.

To prepare students to take a high school test, teachers can make students test oriented. Diagnostic tests could be given, and placement as a result of the test could be made in combination with informal procedures such as personal data and educational and employment background of the students. The information gathered could be used in helping the ABE student set his goals, which, in turn, would be the basis for evaluating his progress. It is important to teach the adult to allocate his time wisely, reread questions, check computations, and be alert to qualifying adjectives in test questions. If these skills are taught, how to take a test becomes part of the student's curriculum.

The effective teacher will see that constant feedback is a natural consequence of the testing situation for the student in the learning process. The student will need this information for planning, to reevaluate and revise his goals. The information obtained through the use of tests should be an aid to the student and the teacher in reaching the desired objectives. Such objectives may be improving achievement in the skill areas, developing suitability for job placement and job promotion, and increasing competency levels. When prepared tests are administered, the student's objectives must still be in the foreground in terms of what they can do to help the student learn more about himself, his characteristics, and his potentialities.

The aforementioned considerations include some of the efforts that teachers could make in classroom situations to teach students according to their motives and needs. For *all* the ranked items, however, teachers have a responsibility to the students. If they start with the causal agents and concerns that the disadvantaged adult brings into the learning situation and utilize carefully selected materials related to these reasons to teach the basic skills, better students as well as a better program will result. Good teachers will look for specific interests and motives of their individual adult students--the real reasons they are attending the learning group--and attempt to modify standard course work accordingly.

Unfortunately, if teachers' assumptions about the reasons behind enrollment do not coincide with the students' reasons, the basic causes for their enrollment are overlooked, and teachers' efforts to provide gratification are without benefit to the students.

While an understanding of common adult motives forms a preliminary basis for satisfactory instruction, teachers seriously interested in adult motivation must review the specific reasons of each individual in the class if immediate success is to be achieved for each particular student and his objectives. Success can only be achieved after interaction and discussion with students in order to modify standard lessons where necessary. Such interaction also helps ensure that each student understands the pertinent relationships between the lesson and his own life, as well as the teacher's interest in him.

Summary

The ABE teacher, working together with the student, must adapt the standard program so that it becomes the vehicle through which motives can be maintained until the objectives are achieved. If the teacher lacks an understanding of these basic needs and causal agents, inefficient learning, boredom, and a feeling that the activity has no personal relevance prevail. An understanding of the motives and appropriate modifications of the program should bring interest, vitality, and continued participation.

NOTES

1. Paul Sheats and others, Adult Education (New York: The Dryden Press, 1963), p. 325.

2. Cyril Houle, The Inquiring Mind (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961).

3. Sherman Sheffield, "The Orientations of Adult Continuing Learners," in The Continuing Learner, ed. by Daniel Soloman (Chicago: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 1964), pp. 1-22.

4. Roy Ingham, "The Relationship of Educative Behavior to the Leisure Satisfaction of College Alumnae," in The Continuing Learner, pp. 23-40.

5. Coolie Verner, Adult Education (New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, 1964), pp. 50-51.

6. John W. C. Johnstone and Ramon Rivera, Volunteers for Learning (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965), pp. 9-10.

7. Doris Hill Adams, "Designing a Model, with Emphasis on Factors Related to Participation, for the In-Service Education of Teachers of Disadvantaged Adults" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1971).

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